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Fulbright Fears Thailand War

Sen. J. William Fulbright wants to throw a spotlight on what he calls the threat of a war in Thailand.

Fulbright complained yesterday that the Johnson administration is keeping the Senate and the public in the dark about U.S. commitments and contingencies in the Southeast Asian Nation, a neighbor of Viet Nam.

It is currently estimated that the United States has 25,000 to 30,000 troops in Thailand.

A source said Fulbright plans to begin closed hearings on the issue Sept. 19 and hopes to hold public hearings—like the ones on Viet Nam and on China—after that.

"We ought to know what we are getting into," Fulbright said at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing yesterday on the so-called "credibility gap" in the administration's public information policies.

Says He Was Wrong

Fulbright said he had been wrong in failing to challenge President Johnson's expansion of the Viet Nam war back in the days of the Tonkin Gulf incident two years ago.

He said the public have a right to know the implications of U.S. military operations in Thailand before a war erupts and the country is presented with an accomplished fact, he said.

"I don't want to be a rubber stamp," Fulbright added.

Unless the administration keeps the Foreign Relations Committee informed, the Senate

should "give up any pretense of being even a junior partner in the process of advice and consent" on foreign policy, the Arkansas Democrat said.

Sylvester on Stand

Fulbright was provoked when Assistant Defense Secretary Arthur Sylvester declined to discuss the Thailand issue in public.

Sylvester said he agrees with Fulbright that the Senate should be consulted on foreign policy but said he would discuss Thailand only in a closed session of the committee.

The committee called the hearing to examine charges that the Defense Department, and the administration in general, attempt to "manage" the news of the Viet Nam war.

Sylvester denied that there is news management by the administration. He said the Defense Department always tells the whole truth about the war.

The only restrictions on coverage of the war are the voluntary agreements by reporters in Viet Nam to withhold information of value to the enemy until it is released, he said.

The only management of news occurs in editorial offices of newspapers and television and radio stations, he said, adding that it always will be necessary for editors to exercise judgment about what news to print and how to report it.

Fulbright agreed that "news management" is exercised

mainly by editors, and that this is necessary.

But he charged that this editorial judgment too often is influenced by the government.

"Many prominent newspapers are almost agents or adjuncts of the government. They don't raise questions about policy," he said.

"You have a very friendly press here in Washington," Fulbright said, contending that there is very little criticism of the Defense Department in Washington newspapers.

"Don't you think it is quite remarkable how far the consensus has gone?" he asked.

"We've been belted here in Washington," Sylvester replied, adding that he sees no signs that the press is sensitive to the power of government regulation in television.

Defends Free Transportation

Sylvester defended a program under which the Pentagon gave free transportation to Viet Nam to 82 newsmen between July, 1964, and August, 1965.

Sylvester said that in 1964 there were only 40 newsmen, American and foreign, in South Viet Nam.

"As a result, there was considerable concern within the Defense Department that the people of the United States were not receiving adequate factual information concerning our efforts in Viet Nam," said Sylvester.

The program was stopped when the press corps had "conducted a buildup of its own" and increased from 40 to about 450, "and the flow of news to the American public had been expanded," said Sylvester.

Fulbright read from an Evening Star editorial of Aug. 24 as follows: "This newspaper, in common with most of the nation's major newspapers, makes it a practice not to travel on government-provided transportation whenever there is commercial transportation available."

Sylvester said The Star did in fact accept government transportation to Viet Nam, even though commercial transportation was available.

There is nothing wrong with this, he maintained, telling Fulbright that there is not a single major newspaper in the country that has not accepted transportation.

Asked whether the Washington

Post had accepted such favors, Sylvester said "an adjunct" of the Post, Newsweek magazine, did.

Fulbright said this information indicated that the editor of The Star "just didn't know what his own paper was doing," and remarked that The Star often is misinformed when it criticizes him editorially.

Clark's Stand

Sen. Joseph Clark, D-Pa., was rougher on Sylvester.

Clark said news policy in Viet Nam is "barbarous . . . manipulative . . . lacking in candor and largely responsible for the gap in credibility."

He said some reporters who received free transportation to Viet Nam wrote stories "pretty much as trained seals."

Sylvester said Clark was dead wrong and was libeling a large number of newsmen.

Fulbright again raised the issue of whether Sylvester said a government has a right to lie to save itself.

Sylvester denied ever making such a statement, and said "no government official ever has the right to lie."

However, he said, officials have the duty to protect the country and in the nuclear age may be justified in withholding some information temporarily for security reasons.

Fulbright also questioned the propriety of having control of public information in Saigon under Barry Zorthian, whom he described as an official of the U.S. Information Agency.

Sylvester said Zorthian was detached from USIA about two years ago and now reports directly to the State Department.

It is unfair to criticize this arrangement, he said, because it is normal practice for the U.S. ambassador in any country to control public information operations.

Although Zorthian is in overall charge in Saigon, Sylvester said, military information is directed by Col. Rodger Bankson of the Army.

Sylvester said he knows of no basis for a charge by Wes Gallagher, general manager of the Associated Press, that Sylvester conducts a "guerrilla war" against American news correspondents in Viet Nam.

Gallagher has been "unhappy" with the Pentagon ever since the Cuban missile crisis, Sylvester said.